

October 2019

To: Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
From: Curt Chisolm, Co-Chair CAC, Tom Cordingly, Co-Chair
Re: *How we got here and where we want to go*

In order to bring clearer focus to our mission, I wanted to outline some history so that we can all better determine our role in advising the Lewis and Clark County and identify next steps.

Spring 2011

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) was formed in the **spring of 2011** to address the overcrowding of our jails. The Council consisted of four District Judges, Police Chief, Sheriff, DOC Parole Officers, County Attorney, representative(?) of the Public Defender, Municipal Court Judge, Justice of the Peace, Chief of Juvenile Probation, three County Commissioners, Helena and East Helena mayors, and an advocate for Crime Victims.

September 2014

This CJCC created, at the direction of the Board of County Commissioners, a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) tasked with the responsibility for providing citizens' input into the workings of our local criminal justice system and to make recommendations relative to improvements, programs, and other matters.

April 2015

The initial membership of the CAC, divided into 5 "subcommittees," (1) Pre-trial and Court Services, (2) Specialty Courts, (3) Mental Health, (4) Jail Standards, (5) Early prevention and Intervention. We delivered recommendations to the CJCC and those recommendations were unanimously accepted by and forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners.

November 2015 A bond for construction of a new detention center (\$46 million) and a permanent operational levy (\$6.5 million annually) proposed. The CAC was temporarily suspended while CAC members formed a political action committee to campaign for the passage of these two issues. Subsequently, both were soundly defeated. The CAC never formally met again, but the work of the committee continued under the leadership group consisting of the Chair, the Vice Chair and the five Chairs of the subcommittees.

March 2016

The CAC submitted a second set of recommendations to the CJCC addressing issues going forward acknowledging the continuing status of the detention center and the mood of the electorate.

June 2016

The proposal for a remodeled detention center (construction bond of \$6.5 million) and an operational levy (\$5.5 million) was put before the voters. In the June election, the construction bond was approved, but the operational levy was again rejected.

November 2017

The leadership group continued to meet periodically to develop and advise on next steps. The County Attorney ruled that the construction bond could be held "in trust" until the operational levy was passed. The operational levy was finally approved setting in motion the necessary funding to allow the plans recommended by the CAC and approved by the CJCC to be implemented.

Fall 2018

The Criminal Justices Service of Lewis and Clark County government was established, and an executive director and staff were hired; plans for the detention center remodel (based partly on CAC recommendations) were initiated, and a new location for police and sheriff departments located.

2018-2019

The CAC was revived with many new community members joining the original leadership team.

June-July 2019

The CAC by-laws were approved and sent to CJCC for their approval.

Victories:

We are one of only five counties in this state that have initiated a pretrial release option so that the courts can allow certain detainees the option to continue with their jobs, live with their families, and receive or continue treatment services.

Note: previously, the courts of initial appearance (JP and City Courts) had only the option of keeping an arrestee in jail or releasing by cash bond. This is no longer the case and although it's often not within the comfort zone for some of our judges, it is our practice and there have not yet been any unfortunate outcomes.

Moving Forward

Our mission is to aggressively monitor the progress of the County in implementing the CAC recommendations and to advise and assist whenever it is appropriate.

Our mission is also to support and champion the efforts of the county in implementing these changes, many of which are innovative and carry a certain amount of risk; the desired outcome is to improve the performance and efficiency of the criminal justice system and allow for a more humane approach to dealing with citizens who have been arrested.

Our mission is to research and validate the efficacy of new and progressive issues not yet addressed by our criminal justice system and bring them forward in formal recommendation to the County when appropriate.

Structure

Given that many of our recommendations cannot be fully implemented until the completion of the jail renovation, the CAC co-Chairs think it best if our agendas for the foreseeable future are more narrowly focused as follows:

1. Schedule specific task force reports on the work of that task force followed by full membership discussion and suggestions.
2. Review monthly status reports from the Director of the County's Criminal Justices Services Department regarding progress on recommendations and other matters of significance.

At our October meeting on Friday, October 25, 2019 we will review this memo and formally assign members to each of the 5 standing task forces and develop a reporting calendar for each task force to report back to the committee of the whole for the foreseeable future.